

May 25, 2025

To Whom It May Concern:

I have known Benjamin Houghton for 18 years. His mother and I were close friends and next door neighbors. When Ben was a child his autism was more noticeable and interfered more in his life. He struggled with behavior issues in elementary school. He seemed to be in his own world and had difficulty complying with school expectations. His mother, Ann, worked with him to develop recognition of his own and other people's emotions. He learned polite manners and how to be considerate of others.

I frequently observed his relationship with his mother, which I consider to have been a challenging, dysfunctional, codependent one. Ann suffered much trauma and tragedy in her life from childhood on, that made her very sensitive and emotional. Ben and Ann deeply loved each other, but frequently bickered and had trouble getting along. Additionally, his mother lived on a very limited budget, so Ben must have felt deprived during his childhood. Ann had severe, painful health problems for her last ten years, which made her less able to be positive with and supportive of Ben. He handled her death, on Nov. 20, 2024, better than I feared he would. He is now an orphan with only a few people involved in his life.

When Ben was nine, he discovered his talent as a pianist. A professional pianist, David, taught and mentored him. Ben became an amazing concert pianist. In his senior year in high school he had the courage to compete in the school's talent show, playing classical music. He won first place. When only 18 years old, Ben put on a couple of free concerts, doing all the arrangements himself - securing the venue, advertising the concert, setting up the concert space, arranging for refreshments, selecting and preparing the pieces he played. Both concerts were well attended and Ben received significant donations from the audience. I have his professional keyboard that he inherited from David, stored under my bed to save for him when he's released.

Ben was a community contributor. Every Thanksgiving, Ben and his mom volunteered to work at the free dinner at the Ocean View Community Center. In January, 2017, he drove two friends and me to Hilo and participated in the Womens' March.

When Ben was in high school and college, I helped him with English assignments. He emailed me his school essays so I could help him with editing and print them for him. Ben is bright and a good writer. He expresses himself well in writing and also has very good spelling and grammar. I enjoyed working with him in this way. He was always polite and expressed gratitude for my help. When I speak with Ben on the phone now, I frequently encourage him to write as a way to discover what he thinks and feels and as a way to be creative.

Ben received a scholarship to attend Hawaii Community College. He had trouble adjusting to the demands of college classes without the special education support he had experienced in high school, so he decided he would rather get a job than continue going to college.

Ben worked at a McDonalds about an hour's drive from our homes. He took the bus to and from work. For a couple of years he seemed to mostly enjoy this job. He was a reliable worker with a positive attitude.

Ben's next job as a medical taxi driver was a good fit for him. He worked long hours and enjoyed the big paychecks due to lots of overtime work. Many of his clients specifically asked to be driven by Ben because they enjoyed his company and appreciated his good manners and helpfulness. The company he worked for took advantage of its employees in many ways, for example providing unsafe vehicles, and requiring them to work as many as 18 hours in a day. When the long work days drove him to exhaustion, Ben quit the job and got a job at UPS. After about two weeks working there, a boss criticized his performance, and Ben was so upset he quit. At that time he went back to the medical taxi job, at the company's delight.

During his time driving the medical taxi, Ben moved out of his mother's home and rented a small cottage nearby. He became independent, though he stopped by to see Ann almost every day on his way home after work. On these visits Ben would do chores for his mom that she could not do because of her fragile health, like carrying drinking water and groceries up the flight of stairs to the living level of her home, vacuuming, and taking out the garbage.

I regard Ben as a gentle, good, kind and caring person who made a huge mistake that has gotten him incarcerated. He has expressed deep sorrow and regret over his mistake and I know his regrets are his true feelings. He accepts that being incarcerated is the consequence of his actions. I am amazed at how positive he is when I talk to him on the phone, given his situation of being incarcerated for over two years.

Ben continues to work hard to make the best he can of his situation. He deserves the opportunity to be transferred to a facility where he can take classes, play the piano, which would be therapy for him and those listening, and to have the needed counselling to become rehabilitated. This would be justice for Ben Houghton.

Sincerely,

Linda Morgan
P.O. Box 377406
Ocean View, HI 96737
808 989-1065